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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the problem and consequences of preschool poverty and outlines the potential contributions of high quality preschool child development programs towards lessening the magnitude of the problem. Data indicate that among children under 6 years of age one in four is now living in poverty, and in 17 states more than one fourth of preschool-aged children live in poverty. Poor children tend to fail in school and drop out before high school graduation. High school dropouts are likely candidates for poverty in their adult lives. Research studies indicate that preschool child development programs can help prevent scholastic failure and reduce other social problems. Further, well-documented cost-benefit analysis indicates that preschool programs can pay for themselves. At the present time, 29 percent of the nation's poor 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs that provide educational activities, though not all of these programs are of the quality necessary to produce extensive social benefits. In view of the fact that federal and state governments spend over 2 billion dollars a year for preschool programs, it is important to insure the quality of such programs so that they can lead to long-term benefits. (RH)

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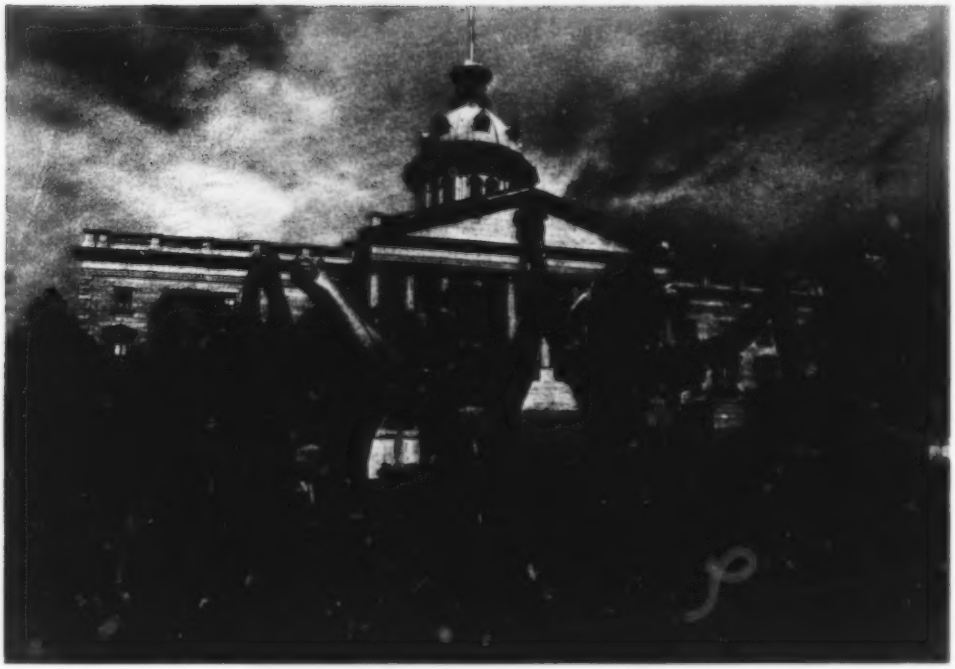

LAWRENCE J. SCHWEINHART

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Lawrence J. Schweinhart and David P. Weikart, Series Editors

No. 4

High/Scope Early Childhood Policy Papers, No. 4

Lawrence J. Schweinhart and David P. Weikart, Series Editors

THE PRESCHOOL CHALLENGE

by Lawrence J. Schweinhart

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

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Foreword

This is the first of two papers on the policy issues of preschool child development programs prepared especially for senior state government officials throughout the country. It frames the problem of preschool poverty and its consequences and outlines the potential contributions of high quality preschool child development programs towards lessening the size of this problem. It will be followed by a paper that explores in greater detail the policy options available to state governments who wish to make investments in these programs.

This is also the fourth in a series of papers by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation on policy issues in early childhood care and education. To date, these papers have provided timely answers to such pressing questions as the following: How many children are enrolled in preschool programs? How much does the public spend? What are the economic costs and benefits of good preschool child development programs? How is preschool program quality defined by parents, by policymakers, by researchers, and by practitioners?

We are witnessing one of those rare times when sound research, on the effects of preschool programs, has captured the attention of the public and policymakers. These papers are our attempt to take advantage of this opportunity to insure that research findings are accurately reflected in public policy.

Lawrence J. Schweinhart
Director, Voices for Children Project
High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
1985

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Executive Summary

Of the nation's children under 6 years of age, one in four is now living in poverty. Seventeen states have more than one fourth of their preschool-aged children living in poverty. Without more help than they now have, these impoverished children are likely to become adults who are unable to make productive contributions to society. The result could be the undermining of the future of our society.

According to the evidence, poor children tend to fail in school and drop out before high school graduation; high school dropouts are likely candidates for poverty in their adult lives. One way to alter this tragic progression is to prevent scholastic failure by providing young children living in poverty with the skills, habits, and attitudes they need to succeed in school.

According to some carefully conducted research studies, preschool child development programs can help prevent scholastic failure. They help poor children get off to a better start in school by improving their intellectual performance as school begins. They reduce children's need to be placed in special education programs or to repeat grade levels because they are unable to do the work expected of them. Over the longer term, there is evidence that these programs help reduce some of society's most pressing problems—school failure, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, and need for welfare assistance. Well-documented cost-benefit analysis indicates that preschool programs can pay for themselves.

Currently 29 percent of the nation's poor 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs that provide educational activities, though not all of these programs are of the quality necessary to produce all the benefits cited above. The federal government spends about one billion dollars a year on Head Start and one billion dollars a year on child care for low-income children. About a dozen states make their own investments, spending a total of $225 million. As these and other resources are committed to preschool programs, it is important to insure the quality of these programs so that they can lead to long-term benefits and improvement in quality of life.

PRESCHOOL POVERTY

Today, one of every four preschool-aged children in the U.S. is poor. Figure 1 illustrates how the poverty rate, especially for young children, has grown since 1969. Preschool poverty is rampant among minorities, extending to half of all black children and two of every five Hispanic children.

Preschool-aged children constitute the age group with the greatest percentage of its members living in poverty. In today's society, dependency and poverty are especially prevalent in childhood and in the later years of life. Yet 25 percent of children under 6 live in poverty, as compared to only 14 percent of adults 65 and over.[1]

Table 1 presents the most recent population estimates by state for 3- and 4-year-olds and the number and percentage of poor children in this age range. States tend to rank in population of poor 3- and 4-year-olds as they rank in general population. The three most populous states--California, Texas, and New York--account for over one fourth of the nation's poor 3- and 4-year-olds. California alone has more poor 3- and 4-year-olds than the 21 least populous states have in this category. States in the South have the highest percentages of poor 3- and 4-year-olds, most having over 30 percent, with Mississippi having the highest at 42 percent.

This paper profited from numerous substantive and stylistic suggestions from Jeff Koshel, Senior Fellow at the National Governors' Association, and Ann Epstein, Leslie dePietro, and David Weikart of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. The work was supported by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. Sole responsibility for the opinions expressed in the article belongs to its author.

Figure 1

U.S. POVERTY RATES, 1969-1983, OVERALL AND FOR CHILDREN UNDER AGE 6

	'69	'70	'71	'72	'73	'74	'75	'76	'77	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	'83
Overall (%)	12	13	13	12	11	11	12	12	12	11	12	13	14	15	15
Under Six (%)	15	17	17	16	16	17	18	18	18	17	18	20	22	23	25

Note. Figures for children under 6 are from unpublished data of the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Figures for the overall poverty rate are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Money income and poverty status of families and persons in the United States: 1983, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 145 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 20.

Table 1

ESTIMATES OF TOTAL AND POOR 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS BY STATE IN 1983

State	Number (thousands)		Percent Poor	State	Number (thousands)		Percent Poor
	Total	Poor			Total	Poor	
USA	6,933	1,726	25				
				Missouri	149	34	23
Alabama	121	41	34	Montana	28	6	22
Alaska	19	4	20	Nebraska	52	10	19
Arizona	95	24	26	Nevada	26	4	14
Arkansas	73	24	33	New Hampshire	26	4	15
California	748	185	25	New Jersey	193	44	23
Colorado	97	18	19	New Mexico	51	16	32
Connecticut	77	15	20	New York	464	144	31
Delaware	17	4	25	North Carolina	168	45	27
DC	14	6	41	North Dakota	23	5	22
Florida	257	75	29	Ohio	322	70	22
Georgia	177	54	31	Oklahoma	105	25	23
Hawaii	33	7	22	Oregon	84	17	21
Idaho	40	9	22	Pennsylvania	309	68	22
Illinois	350	83	24	Rhode Island	23	5	24
Indiana	170	34	20	South Carolina	101	29	29
Iowa	91	17	19	South Dakota	25	7	30
Kansas	77	14	18	Tennessee	136	41	30
Kentucky	116	36	31	Texas	529	143	27
Louisiana	157	52	33	Utah	84	14	17
Maine	33	8	26	Vermont	15	3	23
Maryland	114	22	20	Virginia	151	33	22
Massachusetts	139	31	22	Washington	133	26	20
Michigan	275	62	23	West Virginia	59	16	27
Minnesota	131	23	17	Wisconsin	145	26	18
Mississippi	90	37	42	Wyoming	21	2	11

Note. Data in "Total" columns are resident population estimates from the Current Population Survey of July 1983 by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, unpublished data. Poverty estimates are extrapolated from the national estimate for 1983 (March 1984 Current Population Survey) and the state poverty rates reported by the 1980 Census.

Outcomes of Poverty for Children

Early childhood poverty often leads to scholastic failure, which often leads to socioeconomic failure and poverty in adulthood. When impoverished teenagers and adults become parents, their children are born into poverty. In this country, continuing poverty from generation to generation is not inevitable, but the connection remains strong. Two out of five children from the poorest fifth of families remain in the poorest fifth as young adults; seven out of ten remain in the poorest two fifths.[2]

Poverty increases the likelihood that children will fail in school. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, in 1982 assessed the mathematics performance of studerts at ages 9, 13, and 17 and compared the scores of the urban advantaged to the urban disadvantaged. The urban advantaged scored, on the average across all ages, 22 percentage points higher on the tests--with 69 percent of items correct as compared to 47 percent for the urban disadvantaged.[3]

Poor children are more likely to drop out of high school than are non-poor children. The National Center for Education Statistics examined high school dropout rates in 1982 for a nationally representative sample of young people who had been high school sophomores in 1980. The lowest socioeconomic quartile posted a 17 percent dropout rate--over three times as high as the 5 percent rate for the highest socioeconomic quartile.[4]

Table 2

YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY PERSONS
AGE 25 AND OVER LIVING IN POVERTY IN 1983

Years of School Completed	Percent in Poverty
No years completed	39
Less than 8 years	27
8 years	17
9 to 11 years	21
12 years	11
Some college	5

Note. From U.S. Bureau of the Census, Money income and poverty status of families and persons in the United States: 1983, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 145 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 27.

The fewer years of school adults have completed, the more likely they are to live in poverty. As shown in Table 2, a recent population survey found the poverty rate for adults who had not attended school to be 39 percent, while it was only 5 percent for those who had attended college; the poverty rate increased fairly steadily with the number of years of school completed.

While the strong relationship between years of school completed and subsequent socioeconomic status has not been questioned, some have asked how much this relationship is due to education as opposed to the characteristics of persons who go to school longer. The implication of this question for educational policy is that if students are led to attend school longer without changing their underlying characteristics, there may be no positive effect on their subsequent socioeconomic status. Christopher Jencks and his colleagues, after a painstaking review of the pertinent data for men, concluded that while "only part of the association between schooling and

success can be due to what students actually learn from year to year in school," it is still the case that "The best readily observable predictor of a young man's eventual status or earnings is the amount of schooling he has had."[5]

Poverty and scholastic failure are associated with juvenile delinquency and crime. Although much crime occurs in the absence of poverty and many people living in poverty never engage in crime, there is a significant correlation between poverty and engaging in criminal activity.[6] Moreover, people with incomes below $10,000 in 1981 were 1.5 times more likely to be victims of violent crimes than were persons with higher incomes.[7] One theory of crime and delinquency holds that scholastic success causes students to have strong social bonds to the school and the community, while scholastic failure alienates students from these social institutions, permitting them to engage in delinquent activities.[8]

Poverty is associated with high rates of teenage pregnancy. In one study of 24-year-old women, the poverty rates were 54 percent for teenage mothers who gave birth at age 17 or younger, 33 percent for mothers who gave birth between ages 21 and 23, and 15 percent for women still childless. Of nearly 600,000 teenage mothers who subsequently become family heads, two thirds live in poverty.[9]

Loosening the Grip of Poverty on Children

America has made significant efforts to lessen the pains of poverty for children and youth. States and the federal government provide direct welfare assistance through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and Food Stamps to impoverished families. Medicaid provides financial assistance for health care for children and very poor families.

Job training programs for youth and the Vocational Education program help young people gain the skills necessary for employment. Compensatory education is also provided for some children living in poverty.

One question that has to be addressed by elected officials is whether to make additional efforts to assist people to find their way out of poverty. Job training for youth, compensatory education, and Head Start are certainly aimed at preparing children and youth to go beyond their current life circumstances, but with one child in four below the age of 6 living in poverty, one might very well ask if more should be done.

In recent years, a major effort has been made by a number of states to improve the educational quality of the public school system. In 1983, the publication of A Nation at Risk by the U.S. Department of Education gave the educational reform movement national attention.[10] However, this wave of reforms has so far addressed the prevention of scholastic failure only marginally. One exception is Indiana's Project Prime Time, in which the state offers school districts incentive grants to improve the teacher-child ratio in primary grades.

But even the primary grades may be too late for poor children. One ethnographic study found that the patterns of scholastic success and failure were set in the first few days of kindergarten.[11] Samuel G. Sava, the executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, has argued that "Genuine educational reform must begin early in childhood."[12] Early childhood is a time of life when, at least for some, the stream of poverty and scholastic failure can be diverted to a more successful course.

PRESCHOOL CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The available evidence suggests that one way to prevent early scholastic failure by poor children is to provide preschool child development programs. This idea first became popular among leading educators and social scientists in the 1960s. It led to a variety of experimental programs and, in accord with the spirit of the times, to a limited number of scientific evaluations of the effectiveness of these programs. Despite some early findings that cast doubt on the overall efficacy of the national Head Start program,[13] the later findings of studies of preschool child development programs suggest a possible pattern of causes and effects that stretches from early childhood into adulthood.

Poor children are likely to perform poorly as they enter school because they have not developed, to the same extent as their middle-class peers, the skills, habits, and attitudes expected of children in kindergarten and first grade; this lack of development is manifested in low scores on tests of intellectual, or scholastic, ability. Children who have not developed in this way may be developmentally advanced in other respects not relevant to school success. Their lack of preparedness for school can lead to unnecessary (that is, preventable) placement in special education or retention in grade, low scholastic achievement, and eventually dropping out of high school. Once a pattern of scholastic failure or success is established in the first days of school, it becomes an enduring characteristic.[14] As documented earlier, scholastic failure is associated with poverty, teenage pregnancy, and crime. Poor children who attend good preschool child development programs become better prepared in the skills, habits, and attitudes expected of them in kindergarten and first grade. Thus, they begin a more successful career in school and life.

What Are Preschool Programs?

Preschool child development programs are programs in which 3- and 4-year-olds spend time receiving child care and/or education.

Preschool child care programs maintain hours of operation that permit mothers or other primary caregivers to occupy themselves by employment or schooling. Child care programs may also serve younger children or school-aged children before and after school. Child care programs for school-aged children are sometimes called latchkey programs because they serve as an alternative to leaving children at home by themselves--with latchkeys looped around their necks, figuratively if not literally. Seven out of ten children under age 5 receiving child care receive it in homes, either their own or other people's.

Some preschool programs have education as their sole purpose. The programs typically operate only a few hours a day, from two to five days a week. Preschool "education" should not be equated with direct instruction in academic skills; rather it should be construed broadly, to include indirect teaching and activities that promote children's intellectual, social, and physical development.

Preschool education and child care are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some child care programs include organized educational activities, while others do not. All child care programs could provide educational activities in the broad sense. Table 3 shows the interrelationship between preschool child care and preschool education programs.

Table 3

3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS IN THE U.S.
RECEIVING CHILD CARE AND/OR EDUCATION
(in thousands)

Type of Program	Child Care	No Child Care	Total
Educational Program	1,554 25%	808 13%	2,362 38%
No Educational Program	2,113 34%	1,740 28%	3,853 62%
Total	3,667 59%	2,548 41%	6,215 100%

Note. Education program data come from Milton Chorvinsky, Preprimary enrollment 1980 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics), p. 14. No more than 0.2 percent of children under age 5 of employed mothers are without some form of child care, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Child care arrangements of working mothers: June 1982 (Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 129) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), p. 4. So child care participation was calculated by the female labor force participation rate for mothers of 3- to 5-year-olds reported by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor in March 1984. Thus, child care arrangements of mothers who are students are excluded, while child care arrangements are assumed for mothers who are in the labor force, but unemployed.

Since the term "preschool education" suggests preschool programs that do not meet child care needs and the term "preschool child care" suggests preschool programs that do not provide educational activities, we believe that preschool programs should be grouped in a category entitled "preschool child development programs." This term does not exclude programs with either longer hours of operation or provision of educational activities. This is the term for such programs designated by legislation in both California and South Carolina.

Today, three out of five mothers of 3- and 4-year-olds are employed outside the home. According to parent reports, virtually none of these

children remain home alone, so nearly three out of five 3- and 4-year-olds receive child care of some sort.[15] Child care includes organized educational activities for two fifths of these children, while for three fifths it does not.

Two out of five mothers of 3- and 4-year-olds are not employed outside the home. A third of their children are enrolled in a preschool education program, while two thirds are not.[16]

The distinction between child care and education has been faced by state policymakers in decisions about the length of the kindergarten day. By longstanding tradition, kindergarten programs enrolled children for only half the school day. But in the past few years, full-school-day kindergarten programs have become popular around the country, especially in the South.[17] While there is some evidence for the scholastic effectiveness of these programs,[18] the main reasons for the policy change are simplified transportation needs and popularity with parents because full-school-day programs meet their child care needs better, though not completely.

The more income and education parents have, the more likely are their 3- and 4-year-olds to be in preschool programs that provide organized educational activities. For families with annual incomes below $10,000, the enrollment rate is only 29 percent, while it is 52 percent for families with annual incomes above $20,000. The enrollment rate for 3- and 4-year-old children of elementary school dropouts is 23 percent, but it is 58 percent for children of college graduates.[19]

The Effectiveness of Good Preschool Programs

As might be expected, many studies address the short-term effects of preschool child development programs, while only a handful have been able to examine effectiveness ten years or more after the programs end. Yet, the weight of the evidence from all these studies points in the same direction.

Among the longitudinal studies whose findings are reviewed here are evaluations of Gray's Early Training program in Tennessee, Weikart's Perry Preschool program in Michigan, a Head Start program in Rome, Georgia, and three independently conducted programs in New York—the state Department of Education's Experimental Prekindergarten program, Levenstein's Mother-Child Home program in Long Island, and Palmer's Harlem program in New York City.

As shown in Table 4, these studies indicate that good preschool child development programs for poor children help prevent scholastic failure. First, they help improve children's intellectual performance as school begins; this improvement, on the average, reaches a maximum of 8 points on intelligence tests and lasts from the end of the preschool program to age 8. Second, good preschool programs help reduce the need for poor children to be placed in special education programs or to repeat grade levels because they are unable to do the work expected of them. Third, participation in these programs leads to a lower high school dropout rate.

Additional evidence, largely from the Perry Preschool study, indicates that good preschool programs <u>can</u> lead to consistent improvement in poor children's achievement throughout schooling, a reduced delinquency and arrest rate, a reduced teenage pregnancy rate, an increased employment rate at age 19, and a decreased rate of dependency on welfare at age 19.[20]

Table 4

DOCUMENTED EFFECTS OF GOOD PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR POOR CHILDREN

Finding Study	Program Group	Control Group	Probability of Error[a]
Intellectual ability (IQ) at school entry			
Early Training	96	86	<.01
Perry Preschool	94	83	<.01
Harlem	96	91	<.01
Mother-Child Home	107	103	-
Special education placements			
Rome Head Start	11%	25%	<.05
Early Training	3%	29%	<.01
Perry Preschool	37%	50%	-
New York Prekindergarten (age 9)	2%	5%	<.01
Mother-Child Home (age 9)	14%	39%	<.01
Retentions in grade			
Rome Head Start	51%	63%	-
Early Training	53%	69%	-
Perry Preschool	35%	40%	-
Harlem	24%	45%	<.01
New York Pre-Kindergarten	16%	21%	<.05
Mother-Child Home	13%	19%	-
High school dropouts			
Rome Head Start	50%	67%	<.05
Early Training	22%	43%	<.10
Perry Preschool	33%	51%	<.05
Additional Perry Preschool findings			
Functional competence (average or better score)	61%	38%	<.05
Postsecondary enrollments	38%	21%	<.05
Detentions and arrests	31%	51%	<.05
Teenage pregnancies per 100 girls	64	117	<.10
19-year-olds employed	50%	32%	<.05
19-year-olds on welfare	18%	32%	<.05

Note. Adapted from John R. Berrueta-Clement, Lawrence J. Schweinhart, W. Steven Barnett, Ann S. Epstein, & David P. Weikart, Changed lives: The effects of the Perry Preschool program on youths through age 19, Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 8 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 1984), pp. 2 and 102.

[a]Statistical likelihood that the difference between the groups could occur by chance; "<.01" means that a particular group difference could occur by chance less than 1 time out of 100; "<.05," less than 5 times out of 100.

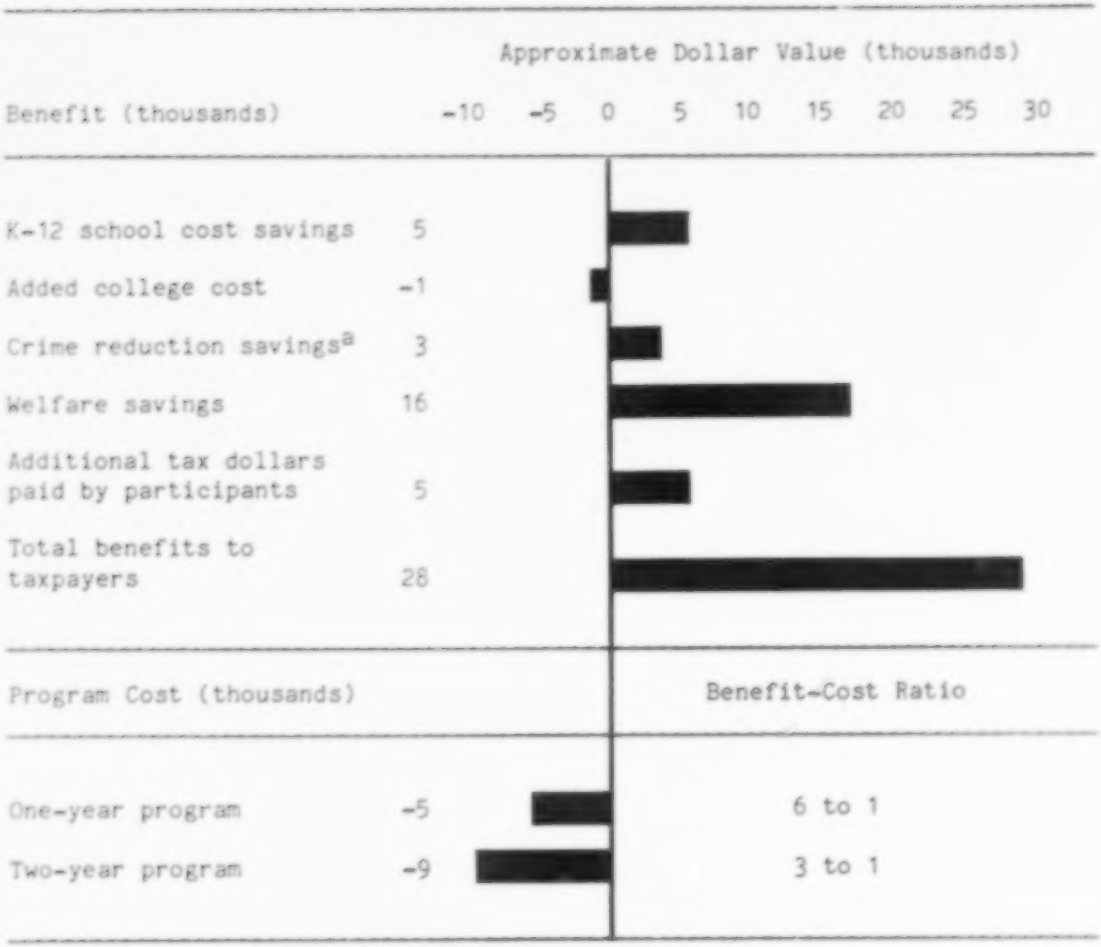
While only one thorough cost-benefit analysis of a preschool child development program has been conducted, its findings are important. The cost-benefit analysis of the Perry Preschool program indicates that such programs can be a good investment for taxpayers. On the basis of a careful analysis of 15 years of follow-up data, this program showed a very positive net present value to taxpayers.

Figure 2 indicates that the major cost of the program (in constant 1981 dollars, discounted at 3 percent annually) is the initial investment of about $5,000 per participant per program year. Major benefits found for the taxpayers were reduced costs per participant of about $5,000 for special education programs, $3,000 for crime, and $16,000 for welfare assistance. Additional postsecondary education costs by participants added about $1,000 to costs. Participants were expected to pay $5,000 more in taxes because of increased lifetime earnings (predicted from their improved educational attainment).

Thus, total benefits to taxpayers amount to about $28,000 per participant, which is nearly six times the initial cost of the one-year program, or three times the cost of the two-year program. The return is large enough that even a two-year program that was only half as effective as the program studied would still yield a positive return on investment. The savings from reduced costs for special education alone are enough to return to taxpayers an amount equivalent to the cost of a one-year program.[21]

Figure 2

PERRY PRESCHOOL PROGRAM PER-CHILD
COSTS AND BENEFITS TO TAXPAYERS



Note. Table entries are constant 1981 dollars, discounted at 3% annually. Adapted from John R. Berrueta-Clement, Lawrence J. Schweinhart, W. Steven Barnett, Ann S. Epstein, & David P. Weikart, Changed lives: The effects of the Perry Preschool program on youths through age 19, Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 8 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 1984), p. 91.

[a]Savings to citizens as taxpayers and as potential crime victims.

These striking findings have prompted words of caution from the researchers who conducted the analysis of the Perry Preschool program:

> There is an urgent need for additional longitudinal research that is adequately designed and implemented to answer the important public policy questions about preschool intervention. The Perry Preschool study stands out for the quality of its design, its lack of attrition, the detail of its data, and its duration (ages 3 through 19)....The Perry study should not continue to stand alone. It leaves too many questions about the type, duration, and intensity of intervention unanswered, and the information the Perry study does yield is derived from a small sample of children.[22]

The research findings cited above are not an endorsement of <u>all</u> early childhood programs. There is no intrinsic value in a young child's leaving home for a few hours a day to join another adult and a group of children. Unless program quality is carefully defined and maintained, a preschool classroom or child care center is just another place for a child to be. The effects of preschool programs have been found for <u>high quality child development programs</u> only—programs whose staff were expert practitioners of child development principles and who had adequate resources.

If a preschool program is to promote healthy child development intellectually, socially, and physically, research and experience shows that it must be conducted in a high quality way by competent child development professionals who establish an environment that supports active learning by the child. To achieve this goal, a child development program should have the following characteristics:

- a ratio of teaching staff to children of no more than 1 to 10 and a classroom group size of no more than 20

- a validated curriculum model, derived from principles of child development, implemented by trained, competent teachers
- support systems to maintain the curriculum model, including curriculum leadership by administration and purposeful inservice training in implementation of the curriculum model
- team planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities by teaching staff
- collaboration between teaching staff and parents as partners in the education and development of children, including substantive face-to-face communication at least monthly

The evidence for preschool child development programs is most extensive and most persuasive with respect to children who are poor or otherwise at risk of scholastic failure. For children who do not fall into these categories, limited evidence from the Brookline Early Education Project in Massachusetts indicates that a good preschool program lessens scholastic problems for middle-class children somewhat, but not as much as for children whose problems are greater.[23]

THE EXPANDING ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENT

In 1983 only 29 percent of all poor 3- and 4-year-olds in the U.S. were enrolled in preschool child development programs--424,000 youngsters.[24] While not all of these programs were good enough to produce long-term benefits to the extent described above, many of them were good enough to yield positive returns on investment as well as a better educational experience for children. The federal government spends about $1 billion a year on Head Start, which serves just over one in five poor 3- and 4-year-olds, and about $1 billion a year on various subsidies to child care programs for low-income children (both poor and near-poor).

Many state policymakers are concerned about childhood poverty and its multiple negative consequences. They have recently increased allocations to preschool child development programs for poor children at risk of scholastic failure and have taken steps to maintain the quality of both existing and new programs in their states. A dozen states now fund preschool child development programs, with total spending of around $225 million. At least 15 more states are considering it.[25]

Policy Options

One way to allocate additional state funds is to place them in existing programs. For example, Alaska and Maine allocate extra funding to the federal Head Start programs in those states. New York State's Prekindergarten program has been expanded from $9 million to $20 million in the past few years. Increased funding allocations can readily be tied to new systems for maintaining the quality of existing programs, such as requirements for teacher training and parent involvement.

Another approach is to begin with pilot programs in a few sites, thereby testing the waters for establishing a new statewide program. This is the approach now taken or planned in at least six states. For example, the Michigan Legislature is allocating $1.2 million for pilot programs to begin in the fall of 1985. Virtually all these programs are being operated through the state education agency and the public schools. One variation on this approach is being carried out in South Carolina, where local advisory councils will allocate the funds. Funding for South Carolina's part-day child development centers for children at risk of scholastic failure nearly doubled in 1984-85 with the passage of Governor Riley's Education Improvement Act. Texas also has also expanded its financial

commitment to preschool child development programs, with funding slated to begin in 1985 that may reach $50 million. Any Texas school district may offer these programs; a school district is required to offer them, however, if it has a certain number of 4-year-olds who either are not fluent in English or are from poor families.

New legislation in Missouri authorizes funding to school districts to conduct developmental screening, parent education programs, and preschool child development programs for developmentally delayed children. Longstanding support for preschool child development programs has also been demonstrated in Minnesota, New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, and in Florida for migrant children. Pilot programs now exist in Louisiana, Maine, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.

California has for some time spent substantially more than other states on child development programs. With state funding of $277 million for such programs for both preschool- and school-aged children, California's funding level is almost double New York's block grant expenditure of $141 million; no other state spends more than $60 million.

The Challenge

As a society, we must weigh the likely costs of postponing action, given the information that we have, against the potential benefits of taking action only after conclusive research has been completed. It is clear that a number of states believe that the social costs of postponing action on preschool child development programs, at least for some children, are potentially quite high. Other states may want to consider providing publicly funded preschool programs that are comparable in quality to the Perry program for children living in low-income families. Pilot efforts

should be carefully evaluated to determine if the intended long-term effects can reasonably be expected, based on effects found in the early years of school. Over time, program coverage could be expanded if the pilot efforts appear to be effective.

In a subsequent paper, we will discuss some basic program options regarding preschool child development programs, to provide senior state officials with additional information about preschool choices.

FOOTNOTES

[1]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Money income and poverty status of families and persons in the United States: 1983, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 145 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984). See also Congressional Research Service and Congressional Budget Office, Children in poverty (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985); and U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Surveys of March, 1969-1983.

[2]Martha S. Hill & Michael Ponza, "Poverty and welfare dependence across generations," Economic Outlook USA (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1983, Summer), p. 61.

[3]Education Commission of the States, National Assessment of Educational Progress, The third national mathematics assessment: Results, trends, and issues (Denver: Author, 1983). Reprinted by the National Center for Education Statistics, The condition of education, NCES 84-401 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 52. "Urban" was distinguished from "rural" and defined as residents of cities with populations of 200,000 or more. "Advantaged" cities had high proportions of residents in professional or managerial occupations; "disadvantaged" cities had high proportions of residents on welfare or not regularly employed.

[4]National Center for Education Statistics, Two years in high school: The status of 1980 sophomores in 1982 (Washington, DC: Author, 1983), p. 3.

[5]Christopher Jencks et al., Who gets ahead? The determinants of economic success in America (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 230. The conclusion is limited to men because the data reviewed were limited to men.

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[10]National Commission on Excellence in Education, A nation at risk (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983). See also Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, Action in the states: Progress toward education renewal (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1984).

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[12]Samuel G. Sava, "Foreword," The education almanac, 1985-1986 (Reston, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1985), p. x.

[13]Westinghouse Learning Corporation, The impact of Head Start: An evaluation of the effect of Head Start on children's cognitive and affective development, Vols. I-II (Athens OH: Ohio University, 1969).

[14]Walter E. Schafer & C. Olexa, Tracking and opportunity: The locking out process and beyond (Scranton, PA: Chandler Publications, 1971).

[15]See the note at the bottom of Table 3, p. 11, for references and qualifications.

[16]Milton Chorvinsky, Preprimary enrollment 1980 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 1982), p. 14.

[17]Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Early childhood development programs in the eighties: The national picture, High/Scope Early Childhood Policy Papers, No. 1 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 1985).

[18]Jack W. Humphrey, A longitudinal study of the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten (Evansville, IN: Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation, 1983).

[19]Chorvinsky, op. cit., p. 10.

[20]John R. Berrueta-Clement, Lawrence J. Schweinhart, W. Steven Barnett, Ann S. Epstein, & David P. Weikart, Changed lives: The effects of the Perry Preschool Program on youths through age 19, Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 8 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 1984), pp. 94-105. See also Irving Lazar, Richard Darlington, Harry Murray, Jacqueline Royce, & Ann Snipper, "Lasting effects of early education," Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, Volume 47, 1-2, Serial No. 194.

[21]Berrueta-Clement et al., op. cit., p. 90; and W. Steven Barnett, The Perry Preschool program and its long-term effects: A benefit-cost analysis, High/Scope Early Childhood Policy Papers, No. 2 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 1985).

[22]Barnett, op. cit.

[23]Donald E. Pierson, Deborah Klein Walker, & Terrence Tivnan, "A school-based program from infancy to kindergarten for children and their parents," The Personnel and Guidance Journal, (1984, April), pp. 448-455.

[24]Chorvinsky, op. cit., p. 10.

[25]Schweinhart, op. cit., pp. 30-36.

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